

HONEST BROKER

What does it mean to the Corps?

Below is the Corps of Engineers' Communication Principles from the headquarters web page. These principles epitomize the overarching philosophy behind the definition of honest broker.

- Listen to all constituencies both inside and outside USACE regarding issues of importance to them, respecting their viewpoint.
- Communicate early, clearly, completely, honestly, accurately, and often with all constituencies on issues of importance.
- Incorporate communication activities as an integral part of project management business process.
- Be accessible to all constituencies and respond promptly without censorship or misinformation. [NOTE: This communication principle has potential conflict because of use of the word "censorship". Water Management is sensitive to data that may be considered proprietary for power marketing purposes.]
- Proactively inform the public and other constituencies of the Corps vital role in areas where we have special expertise.
- Do what we say we will do.

To the Corps, the honest broker considers all the multiple purposes of the dams and recognizes the positive and negative affects of operation including power generation on the region. Most Corps water management decisions are objective but frequently are not based solely on economic criteria. There simply are too many non-monetary considerations (environmental and safety for instance). Decisions may be qualitative rather than quantitative.

Water Management is not operating with lawsuits as a constant threat, or worry; but our decisions are made understanding how these decisions may lead to legal action against the Corps as a possible outcome. In using the communication principles above, these tools help ease the future concern about legal action by keeping a thorough and timely administrative record. The administrative record is an important tool to document our use of the principles above, and how we arrived at a particular decision. Therefore if future legal actions occur, the record speaks for itself. The communications principles apply to both oral and written communication.

The honest broker is an arbitrator, negotiator, mediator, and more depending on the situation. There can be a blend of many models. In the context of Corps-BPA understanding, the Corps needs to understand BPA's marketing goals, and objectives (i.e., how much water is worth to BPA in the future); and BPA needs to understand Corps' goals and objectives (anything that we do that deviates from a customer's understanding and expectations). A good mutual understanding of each agency's value system must be achieved. This could be accomplished with an honest review of past contentious cases, with an eye to understanding the quantitative and qualitative factors in the discussion to reaffirm each agency's value system.